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Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)

Summary record of the 2nd meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 8 October 2007 at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. Mohamad ..... (Sudan)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 36: Information from Non-Self-Governing Territories transmitted under Article 73 *e* of the Charter of the United Nations (A/62/23, chaps. VII and XII, and A/62/67)

Agenda item 37: Economic and other activities which affect the interests of the peoples of the Non-Self-Governing Territories (A/62/23, chaps. V and XII)

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Agenda item 39: Offers by Member States of study and training facilities for inhabitants of Non-Self-Governing Territories (A/62/68 and Add.1)

Agenda item 40: Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (*Territories not covered under other agenda items*) (A/62/23 and A/62/128)

1. **The Chairman** recalled that the cause of decolonization had been one of the defining issues of the latter part of the twentieth century. Owing to the untiring efforts of the United Nations, most of the world's population was no longer under colonial rule. Nevertheless, 16 Non-Self-Governing Territories remained on the United Nations list. It was therefore vital to maintain the momentum and complete the task of decolonization in the shortest possible time.

2. **Mr. Ja'afari** (Syrian Arab Republic), speaking in his capacity as Rapporteur of the Special Committee on decolonization, introduced the Special Committee's report (A/62/23). Although the report had been streamlined, it continued to provide a comprehensive account of the Committee's work. The Special Committee had continued to analyse developments in the Non-Self-Governing Territories and had benefited, during the Caribbean regional seminar and during its regular session, in June, from the participation of representatives from the Territories, three of the four administering Powers, as well as from non-governmental organizations and experts.

3. In its report, the Special Committee stressed that the role of the administering Powers in ensuring progress towards decolonization could not be underestimated and noted the exemplary cooperation of New Zealand with regard to the work of the Special Committee concerning Tokelau. It would soon be sending a mission to Tokelau to observe the referendum on self-determination. At the Caribbean regional seminar, discussions had focused on a strategy aimed at strengthening cooperation with administering Powers and improving the participation of the people of Non-Self-Governing Territories.

4. Finally, he said that the report underlined the importance of visiting missions as a means of providing and collecting information on the decolonization process.

5. **Ms. Ferrari** (Saint Vincent and the Grenadines), speaking in her capacity as Chairman of the Special Committee on decolonization, said that decolonization remained a priority that required, inter alia, a collaborative effort by the United Nations system, the administering Powers, the international community and the people of the Territories themselves. It was especially important to provide the latter with information on the full range of decolonization options open to them. In that connection, she drew attention to a leaflet entitled "What the United Nations can do to assist Non-Self-Governing Territories", which had been produced by the Department of Public Information and the Department of Political Affairs.

6. Turning to the draft resolutions which it was recommending for adoption by the General Assembly, she said that the Special Committee had sought to formulate more action-oriented and focused recommendations so as to take account of the individual needs of the various Territories. Complete eradication of colonialism would require innovative, negotiated approaches to self-determination and a willingness on the part of all parties to cooperate.

7. Finally, she noted that New Zealand had cooperated in an exemplary fashion and that Tokelau was in the final stages of determining its future status with the administering Power.

8. **Mr. Martínez** (Dominican Republic), speaking on behalf of the Rio Group, said that the Rio Group reaffirmed its support for the decolonization process and called upon the administering Powers to adopt the necessary measures for the decolonization of the remaining Non-Self-Governing Territories, taking into account their particular characteristics. It hoped that

the administering Powers would disseminate information concerning the Territories under their control. The Rio Group supported the work of the United Nations Information Centres and the Department of Public Information in disseminating information aimed at promoting the objectives of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. It welcomed the publication of the leaflet entitled "What the United Nations can do to assist the Non-Self-Governing Territories".

9. The Rio Group expressed its support for the Government of the Argentine Republic and felt confident that the Governments of the Argentine Republic and of the United Kingdom would resume negotiations to find a peaceful, just and definitive solution to the sovereignty dispute relating to the Malvinas (Falkland), South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands and the surrounding maritime areas in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly and the Organization of American States.

10. With regard to the small island Territories in the Caribbean and the Pacific, the international community must facilitate sustainable growth of their economies in order to advance the decolonization process and must pay special attention to the particular problems affecting those Territories.

11. Concerning Western Sahara, the Rio Group expressed its satisfaction with the progress made by the Secretary-General's Personal Envoy for Western Sahara and with the fact that the parties concerned had decided to resume negotiations in accordance with the various Security Council resolutions. Finally, it noted the progress made by Tokelau.

12. **Mr. Liu** Zhenmin (China) observed that, notwithstanding repeated reiterations, inter alia, in the 2005 World Summit Outcome of the need to respect the right of people to self-determination, there were still 2 million people living in Non-Self-Governing Territories. Member States were duty bound to take an active interest in helping dependent peoples to exercise that right. The Committee had made vigorous efforts to strengthen its links with the Territories by various means and to encourage closer cooperation with the administering Powers. China had always supported the rights of the people of Non-Self-Governing Territories.

13. **Mr. Sahel** (Morocco) said that the Committee's consideration of the question of Western Sahara was taking place in a promising context established by Security Council resolution 1754 (2007) following the submission by his Government, on 11 April 2007, of a document entitled "Moroccan initiative for negotiating an autonomy statute for the Sahara region" to the Secretary-General. That initiative was the result of a process of national consultation between all the national political parties and the representatives of the Saharan population. The autonomy statute would be submitted to the populations concerned for a referendum. The proposal would benefit all the inhabitants of the region for it would allow the people of the region to run their own affairs democratically within the framework of national territorial integrity.

14. The Security Council had taken note of the proposal (in resolution 1754 (2007)) and had called upon the parties to enter into negotiations without preconditions in good faith, taking into account the developments of the last months. The Council had thereby initiated a new political process that offered hope for the region.

15. His delegation welcomed the fact that the negotiations that had been held following the adoption of that resolution had rectified an earlier injustice and that the right of the majority of the population of Western Sahara to be represented at negotiations on the future of the region had been reaffirmed. It was essential that the discussion of the question of Western Sahara should be held in a spirit of consensus, reason and moderation, and that the text of the Committee's resolution on the subject should be in line with Security Council resolution 1754 (2007). Any attempt to depart from that resolution or to revive previous initiatives could compromise the new negotiation process and thwart the international community's attempts to bring an end to a conflict which had dragged on for too long. Accordingly, his delegation would not support any draft resolution that did not reflect the spirit and the letter of Security Council resolution 1754 (2007).

16. Finally, he reiterated his Government's willingness to negotiate with other parties and to cooperate with the Organization in order to bring about a solution acceptable to all, in the interest of peace, regional understanding and reconciliation in the Maghreb.

17. **Mr. Perazza** (Uruguay), speaking on behalf of the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) member States and associated States, reiterated their support for the legitimate rights of the Argentine Republic with regard to the Malvinas (Falkland Islands) and expressed the hope that a solution could be found, at the earliest possible time, to the prolonged sovereignty dispute between the Argentine Republic and the United Kingdom relating to the Malvinas (Falkland), South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands and the surrounding maritime areas, in accordance with the resolutions of the United Nations and the declarations of the Organization of American States (OAS). In that context, he underscored the continued readiness of the Argentine Republic to renew bilateral negotiations on sovereignty with a view to achieving a fair, peaceful and lasting solution to that dispute.

18. The question of the Falkland Islands (Malvinas) had been described by General Assembly resolution 2065 (XX) and numerous subsequent resolutions and by the Special Committee as a special and particular colonial question involving a dispute concerning sovereignty between the Argentine Republic and the United Kingdom which required a peaceful, negotiated solution. The specificity of the dispute had been recognized by all the Member States, including the United Kingdom, and stemmed from the fact that the United Kingdom had occupied the islands in question by force in 1833, expelling their inhabitants and replacing them with settlers of British descent. The latter could not therefore be considered a repressed or occupied people. Accordingly, the General Assembly had stressed that the dispute could not be resolved through application of the principle of self-determination.

19. The MERCOSUR member States and associated States therefore called on the parties to respect the will of the international community, as reflected in relevant resolutions, and to resume negotiations in order to resolve their dispute.

20. **Mr. Yousfi** (Algeria) said that his delegation had always supported the right to self-determination of the people of Western Sahara, and the holding of a free and credible referendum on self-determination, and had supported the various efforts in that regard, including the Houston accords and the Baker peace plan as set out in Security Council resolution 1495 (2003). It had sought to promote reconciliation between the two parties to the conflict with a view to helping them build a future together based on peace, stability and shared prosperity. It had therefore welcomed the adoption of Security Council resolution 1754 (2007), which called upon the parties to enter into negotiations without preconditions, thereby clearly rejecting the efforts of one party to predetermine the outcome of any negotiations. In that context he recalled that in 1975 the International Court of Justice had declared that there was no legal basis for Morocco's claims in Western Sahara.

21. Noting that there had been reports in the media concerning repression of the Saharawi people living in the occupied territories, he said that those people should receive international protection. Moreover, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights should make public its report on its mission to Western Sahara and should implement its recommendations in cooperation with the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). Journalists, parliamentarians and humanitarian organizations should be given free and unrestricted access to Western Sahara and its people. The Saharawi refugees living a precarious existence in Algeria should not be used as pawns by the occupying Power and should receive increased humanitarian assistance from the international community.

22. His delegation was convinced that a fair and lasting resolution of the conflict in Western Sahara required a free referendum without restrictions on the right to self-determination of the Saharan people, and he urged the Committee to express its support for the people of Western Sahara by backing the efforts of the Secretary-General to promote the negotiations called for in Security Council resolution 1754 (2007).

23. **Mr. Badji** (Senegal) said that Senegal enjoyed good relations with all the countries of the region and had always supported initiatives aimed at securing a fair and lasting settlement acceptable to both parties to the conflict in Western Sahara. It therefore welcomed the efforts of the Personal Envoy of the Secretary-General to bring the parties back to the negotiating table. While supporting the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Morocco over Western Sahara, his delegation likewise supported all efforts aimed at promoting peace and reconciliation. In that context, he noted that the Moroccan proposal submitted to the Secretary-General on 11 April 2007 was a compromise proposal which was in accordance with international law and the right to self-determination.

24. The recent meetings held in New York in conformity with Security Council resolution 1754 (2007) held out the promise of an end to the suffering of the people in the region. He called on the parties concerned to exercise restraint, to negotiate in good faith and to try to reach consensus. He hoped that the resolution on the question of Western Sahara to be adopted by the Committee would be a first step towards that new consensus.

25. **Mr. Chissano** (Mozambique) noted that the recent direct talks between Morocco and the Frente POLISARIO held pursuant to Security Council resolution 1754 (2007) offered hope that a mutually acceptable solution to the conflict might be reached, and he called on the parties to the conflict to take full advantage of the opportunity offered by those negotiations. He also commended the efforts of the Secretary-General and his Personal Envoy in that regard.

26. **Mr. Antonio** (Angola), recalling that his country's long decolonization process had ultimately succeeded thanks to the efforts of many delegations present, said that Angola was morally obliged to contribute to the Committee's work. Indeed, decolonization should remain one of the principal concerns at the United Nations.

27. The status of the Western Sahara and its quest for self-determination was the most important question before the Committee and it should be resolved as quickly as possible. The Saharan people should be allowed to choose their destiny by referendum, just as other colonized peoples had before them.

28. Welcoming the start of direct negotiations between Morocco and the Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguía el-Hamra y de Río de Oro (Frente POLISARIO), he called on the parties to negotiate without preconditions and in good faith as requested in Security Council resolution 1754 (2007) in order to achieve a just, lasting and mutually acceptable political solution, that would provide for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara. He urged the Committee to adopt the draft resolution before it so that the Organization could send a clear message to the parties.

29. **Mr. Maleki** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that all administering Powers had the obligation to ensure a free flow of information to and from the dependent Territories in order to raise the people's awareness of their rights and of the progress they were making towards self-determination. Any decision to remove a Territory from the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories should be taken transparently, once the people had freely and knowledgeably chosen their future political system.

30. The periodic visiting missions and regional seminars were useful tools for evaluating the situation in the various Territories and speeding decolonization. Such missions and seminars should be held annually — the latter, preferably, in the Territories themselves — but that required the cooperation of the administering Powers. A serious and respectful relationship must be established between the Special Committee and the various administering Powers, all of whom should participate in its important work. The Special Committee needed to receive from the administering Powers the latest information relating to the economic, social and educational conditions in the Territories for which they were responsible.

31. The administering Powers also had a solemn obligation to promote the political, economic and educational advancement of the inhabitants of the Territories and to protect the natural resources that were their heritage, and to refrain from harmful economic or other activities. It was thus a matter of concern that some administering Powers were conducting military activities and establishing military installations that ran counter to the interests of the people.

32. His Government reaffirmed its dedication to the goal of eradicating colonialism throughout the world.

33. **Mr. Smith** (Fiji) observed that in the course of decolonization there was no alternative to self-determination. All options were valid as long as they were in accordance with the freely expressed wishes of the people concerned and in conformity with clearly defined United Nations principles. Any attempt to disrupt the national unity and territorial integrity of a country was incompatible with the Charter.

34. The situation of each Non-Self-Governing Territory was unique. Many were small islands but, irrespective of size, isolation or resources, each must be helped by the administering Power to exercise its right to self-determination without interference.

35. Regarding the Territories in the Pacific region, Fiji was aware that American Samoa had expressed

satisfaction with its current relationship with the administering Power, and it would respect and support the wishes of the people as they negotiated their status and future relationship. Regarding Guam, it supported the Chamorro people's request not to be removed from the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories and asked the administering Power to take steps to promote the sustainable development of Guam's economy and involve the people in that process. France's efforts to further the economic, social and cultural development of the Kanak people in New Caledonia, and the closer and friendlier relations it had developed with the countries of the Pacific, were to be commended. Also, New Zealand's cooperation with the Special Committee as the administering Power of Tokelau had been exemplary. The people of that small island Territory would soon be going to the polls to determine its destiny as a nation, and Fiji wished them well.

36. Regarding Territories in other regions, his Government strongly supported the efforts of the Secretary-General and his Personal Envoy to find a political solution acceptable to all parties to the dispute over Western Sahara. The current situation could lead to instability and economic stagnation in the Maghreb. Negotiations should also continue between the parties concerned on the question of the Falkland Islands/Malvinas; the views of the inhabitants themselves should also be ascertained by the Special Committee, self-determination being, after all, the first principle of decolonization.

37. Formal and informal contacts between the Special Committee and the administering Powers had proven to be valuable in developing programmes for the decolonization of specific Territories. Visiting missions were also an effective means of ascertaining the situation in the Territories and the wishes of their inhabitants. The issues involved in decolonization were complex, but Fiji was optimistic that, given cooperation and support, progress would be made in eradicating colonialism.

38. **Mr. Romero Martínez** (Honduras) said that the items on the Committee's agenda were vitally important for international peace and security, for the self-determination of peoples and the full enjoyment of individual and collective human rights. The people of Territories in particularly difficult situations should be given economic assistance and offered training and educational opportunities. Honduras attached great importance to all efforts at reconciliation and dialogue that promoted the freedom of peoples and looked forward to the elimination of any type of mistreatment or human rights violation in any part of the world. The Committee's work should culminate in resolutions reflecting the common aspiration for the well-being of all peoples and respect for people of any race, colour or creed.

39. **Mr. Cabral** (Guinea-Bissau) recalled that decades earlier, Guinea-Bissau itself had, with tireless support from the Committee, achieved its noble aim of liberation, and that it was now collaborating with other members to satisfy the legitimate hopes of those still expecting United Nations help.

40. Regarding the Territory of Western Sahara, his Government welcomed Security Council resolution 1754 (2007) and it urged the General Assembly to encourage the parties to break the impasse by trying innovative approaches. The situation was urgent. Following the Manhasset meetings, it was to be hoped that the higher interests of the region and of Africa as a whole would guide the negotiations. The Committee itself must join the common effort and put pressure on the parties to continue on the promising new path until the negotiations succeeded. A spirit of consensus must reign.

Requests for hearings

41. **The Chairman** drew attention to communications containing requests for hearings under item 40: 1 relating to Gibraltar (A/C.4/62/2), 54 relating to Western Sahara (A/C.4/62/3 and Add.1-53), 3 relating to Guam (A/C.4/62/4 and Add.1-2), and 1 relating to New Caledonia (A/C.4/62/5). He took it that the Committee wished to grant those requests.

42. *It was so decided.*

43. **Ms. Mace** (United Kingdom), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, in response to remarks made by the representatives of the Dominican Republic, Uruguay, Honduras and Fiji on the issue of sovereignty of the Falkland Islands, said that the United Kingdom's position on the issue was well known and had been reiterated on 1 October 2007 by the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom. The United Kingdom had no doubts about its sovereignty over the Falkland Islands. There could be no negotiations on the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands unless and until such time as the islanders so wished.

44. **Mr. Chabar** (Morocco), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that Algeria had no right to thwart the desire for territorial reunification that had been expressed by the legitimate representatives of the Saharan people at the Manhasset meetings. It had been trying to undermine the possibility of a political solution to the question of Western Sahara for more than 30 years.

45. It should be recalled that the majority of the Saharan people lived in southern Morocco and that Algeria had never been authorized to speak on their behalf. Moreover, the Frente POLISARIO had never been recognized as the sole representative of the Saharan people.

46. Algeria was in no position to speak of human rights in view of its refusal to meet with the delegation of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the deplorable situation in Tindouf. Moreover, neither the International Court of Justice, in its advisory opinion of 16 October 1975, nor the United Nations, in any of its resolutions, had ever designated Morocco as an occupying Power.

47. **Mr. Baali** (Algeria), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the suffering of the Saharawi would not end until they were allowed to exercise their right to self-determination.

48. The assertion that the Security Council, in its resolution 1754 (2007), had taken note of the Moroccan proposal only was not true. Moreover, it was absurd to deny that the Frente POLISARIO was the legitimate representative of the Saharawi people. Had it not been the Frente POLISARIO that had negotiated on behalf of the Saharawi at both the Houston and Manhasset meeting?

49. Turning to human rights, he said that Morocco was trying to deflect attention away from its own human rights record and he asked the representative of Morocco to provide documentary evidence in support of his allegations. In fact, the worst human rights violations occurred in the Moroccan-occupied Western Sahara, which was closed to the media.

50. **Mr. Chabar** (Morocco) said that, in its resolution 1754 (2007), the Security Council had established a hierarchy when it had chosen to commend the Moroccan proposal. The Council had also called upon the parties to enter into negotiations taking into account the developments of the last months — a clear reference to the Moroccan proposal.

51. Any democratic solution to the conflict should not ignore the will of the majority of the Saharan people. That majority, which lived in the Western Sahara, not in Tindouf, supported the Moroccan proposal on autonomy for the Saharan people.

52. **Mr. Baali** (Algeria) said that delegations had been given a selective reading of Security Council resolution 1754 (2007). The Council had not accorded any special status to the Moroccan proposal; there had, in fact, been two proposals on the table at Manhasset. It was also absurd to say that in referring to the "developments of the last months" the Council had meant only the Moroccan proposal.

53. The Moroccan autonomy proposal was groundless because the Western Sahara was not Moroccan territory. The Saharawi did not need more autonomy; they merely wanted to exercise the right to self-determination.

The meeting rose at 5.50 p.m.